CRITICAL ROLE
VOX MACHINA
ORIGINS

VOLUME III

MATTHEW MERCER | JODY HOUSER | OLIVIA SAMSON

J.P. MASSA | DIANA SOUSA | ARIANA MAHER

CRITICAL ROLE

VOX MACHINA™

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CRITICAL ROLE: VOX MACHINA ORIGINS
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WESTRUUN

LOOK, MA! LOOK!

IT'S VOX MACHINA!

I NEED A DRINK.

WE ALL NEED A DRINK.

AND THAT IS WHY YOU ALWAYS AGREE TO MEET YOUR CLIENTS AT A TAVERN.

"CLIENT" IMPLIES THAT WE HAD A SAY IN THE MATTER.

I KNEW TRAVELING WITH YOU FINE FOLKS WOULD BE INTERESTING...

YOU HAVE YET TO DISAPPOINT.

I'M HOPING YOU HAD MORE LUCK WITHIN THE SHADEBARROW?

IT APPEARS MY HOPES HAVE BEEN REWARDED, THEN!

ALL IN A DAY'S WORK FOR THE ***MIGHTY HEROES*** OF VOX MACHINA!

"UNBELIEVABLY ***PUNY***, IN FACT. IT NEVER STOOD A ***CHANCE*** AGAINST--"

YES, YES. I'M SURE IT WAS QUITE... ***INVIGORATING.***

AS PROMISED, YOUR DEBT TO MY MASTER IS REPAID...

...AND ***THIS*** SHOULD COVER THE DIFFERENCE.

"DON'T SPEND IT ALL IN ONE PLACE."

"FIVE OF *EVERYTHING* ON THE MENU!"

DON'T YOU ***LOVE*** THE SMELL OF WINTER'S CREST FESTIVAL IN THE AIR? THE CRISP TANG OF ERREVON'S DEFEAT!

WHO THE WHATSITNOW?

ERREVON THE RIMELORD. AN ELEMENTAL ***INVADER*** WHO ***TORE A HOLE*** BETWEEN THE VERY PLANES THEMSELVES TO STRIKE FROM THE FROSTWEALD!

HIS ***ICY INCLINATIONS*** TURNED MUCH OF TAL'DOREI INTO A FROZEN ***WASTELAND!***

BUT HE WAS DEFEATED! A GROUP OF HUMANS, DWARVES, AND ELVES JOINED FORCES TO ***BANISH*** ERREVON FROM THIS PLANE.

IT'S THAT ***GLORIOUS UNION*** OF HEROES THAT WE CELEBRATE!

OF COURSE, NOWADAYS IT'S MOSTLY AN EXCUSE TO GET HAMMERED.

THAT MIGHT BE A BIT DIFFICULT...

...CONSIDERING WE'RE PRETTY MUCH OUT OF MONEY.

I *KNEW* THE MASSAGES WERE TOO MUCH...

BUT...THE *LADIES!*

DON'T LOOK AT ME. I WAS *WINNING* MONEY.

...MOSTLY.

AW, I DON'T EVEN DRINK *THAT* MUCH.

COMPLAINING *WON'T* REFILL THIS BAG.

WE NEED A NEW JOB TO--

PLEASE, SOMEONE!

MY POOR SON, HE'S STILL *MISSING!*

I DON'T HAVE MUCH TO OFFER IN EXCHANGE, BUT *SURELY* SOME KIND HEART--

BAH! WE DON'T OFFER CHARITY HERE.

PLEASE. TELL ME WHAT'S THE MATTER.

PERHAPS MY FRIENDS AND I CAN HELP.

MY SON, NOW MISSING ***TWO WEEKS.*** TAKES AFTER ME, BUT WITH LIGHTER HAIR.

I DON'T HAVE ANYTHING NEAR AS VALUABLE AS ***HE*** IS. BUT WHATEVER COIN I HAVE...

WE SAID WE NEEDED A NEW JOB. RIGHT?

WE'RE NOT EXACTLY BABYSITTERS. NOW, IF SHE WANTED US TO FIND HER SON AND ***SLAY*** HIM...

STUBBY'S RIGHT. NOT REALLY OUR AREA OF EXPERTISE HERE.

BUT SHE'S ALL ***ALONE*** AND ***SAD*** AND WE ***DO*** HELP PEOPLE SOMETIMES!

BESIDES, IT'S NOT LIKE WE HAVE ANY ***OTHER*** WORK LINED UP.

I GUESS IT COULDN'T HURT TO LOOK INTO--

THAT'S ***EXACTLY*** WHAT PEOPLE SAY BEFORE SOMETHING ***REALLY*** HURTS.

YOU'RE STRANGELY QUIET, GROG.

I WOULDN'T HAVE EXPECTED MISSING CHILDREN TO BE SUCH A SOFT SPOT FOR YOU.

MISSING ***WHOSIT?***

I'M MOURNING MY EMPTY MUG.

AND NOT HAVING ENOUGH MONEY TO FILL IT.

GOODBYE, ALE...

GUNK

WHO THREW THIS AT ME?!

WHO HAS A *DEATH WISH*?!

OH, DID I--

--HURT YOUR POOR WIDDLE UGLY BABY HEAD?

WHAT DID YOU JUST SAY TO ME?!

WERE THERE TOO MANY WORDS FOR YOUR POOR WIDDLE UGLY BABY EARS?

THOK

OH, GROG. NOT AGAIN.

HEY!

BEER BRAWL!

AS I WAS SAYING, THE SPIRIT OF HUMANS, DWARVES, AND ELVES FIGHTING TOGETHER IN--

WATCH THE MONEYMAKER!

AW, I WAS JUST HAVING SOME *FUN*...

I KNOW, GROG.

WHAT A MESS...

AND YET! THE BARTENDER FORGOT TO CHARGE US FOR OUR DRINKS.

I'D CALL THAT A WIN.

IF YOU WERE EVEN *HALF* AS STRONG AS YOU ARE UGLY, MIGHT HAVE BEEN A *BETTER* FIGHT.

WHY DON'T YOU SAY THAT TO MY *FACE*?!

DARLING, HE *JUST* DID.

SUCH *VIGOR* IN YOU!

THE NAME IS KRADIN GRIMTHORNE.

AND I SEE WITHIN YOU A LOVE OF *FIGHT* AND OF *GLORY.*

I LOVE FIGHTING *AND* I LOVE GLORY!

YOU'RE VERY WISE.

AND WHAT ABOUT FIGHT AND GLORY... FOR COIN?

EVEN BETTER!

REALLY SHOULD HAVE LED WITH THAT PART.

WE'RE LISTENING...

ARE YOU FAMILIAR WITH THE BRAWLERS' LEAGUE OF TAL'DOREI?
YEAH!
...WAIT. NO.
IT'S A VERY SECRET, VERY PRESTIGIOUS FIGHTING RING.
HOW, PRAY TELL, CAN SOMETHING BE ***BOTH*** PRESTIGIOUS AND SECRET?
I MYSELF AM SOMETHING OF A FINDER OF TALENT.
SEARCHING FOR THOSE STRONG ENOUGH OF ***BODY*** AND ***WILL*** TO STAND A CHANCE IN THE BRAWLERS' LEAGUE.
AND I KNOW A GROUP OF ***WINNERS*** WHEN I SEE THEM.
I'D BE PROUD TO REPRESENT YOU IN THE UPCOMING ROUND RIGHT HERE IN WESTRUUN.
THE WINNERS' PURSE IS ***QUITE*** SUBSTANTIAL.
I ***LOVE*** SUBSTANTIAL!

NOW, AS YOUR REPRESENTATIVE, I'D BE YOUR CONNECTION TO THE LEAGUE. I'LL ***EVEN*** PAY YOUR ENTRY FEE.

OF COURSE, AS A REWARD FOR MY ***GENEROUS*** INVESTMENT, I'D BE TAKING A SHARE OF THE WINNINGS.

I DON'T KNOW, I'VE NEVER HEARD OF THE BRAWLERS' LEAGUE BEFORE...

JUST HOW ***LARGE*** A SHARE?

AW, COME ON, PIKE! YOU AND ME! IT'LL BE ***GREAT!***

IT'S NOT LIKE WE HAVE ANY OTHER WORK LINED UP...

THERE'S THAT MISSING BOY.

PAYING WORK.

DISTRACTED CROWDS, FULL COIN PURSES...

I SUPPOSE IF NO ONE HAS ANY OTHER OBJECTIONS...

...MONEY IS MONEY.

YOU'LL BE FIGHTING IN THREE DAYS AT THE ARENA BENEATH THE IRONHAND TRADING COMPANY WAREHOUSE.

...YOU'LL HAVE TO LEAVE YOUR BEAR AT HOME.

HAHAHAHA!

NOW LADIES, I CAN'T SAY EXACTLY WHAT I'M UP TO. ***TOP SECRET*** AND ALL.

BUT IT DOES PAY ***VERY*** WELL.

HE'S A LITTLE BOY, DWARF. I DIDN'T GET HIS AGE...OR HIS NAME...

NOT YOUR BEST CLASS OF NEIGHBORHOOD, IS IT?

IRONHAND TRADING CO.

I'M SORRY, NEXT TIME WE'LL AIM FOR THE *FANCY* SECRET UNDERGROUND FIGHTING CLUB.

I CAN HEAR PEOPLE...

...A *LOT* OF PEOPLE.

WOOOH!

THIS IS... A LOT.

THIS. IS. THE MOST **BEAUTIFUL** THING. I HAVE **EVER** SEEN. IN MY **WHOLE** LIFE.

MY FRIENDS! YOU'VE FINALLY MADE IT!

YOU *JUST* MISSED ONE *VERY* EXCITING MATCH!

BUT BETTER THAT THAN YOUR OWN...

SPEAKING OF, BETTER HURRY UP AND GO GET YOU REGISTERED.

GROG?

PIKEY...IT'S SO *BEAUTIFUL*...

NIMA! THESE ARE THE NEW FIGHTERS I TOLD YOU ABOUT!

THEY'RE HERE TO GET REGISTERED.

DON'T LOOK NEARLY AS STURDY AS YOUR LAST ONES, GRIMTHORNE.

"LAST ONES," HMM?

WHAT, DID YOU THINK THIS WAS MY ***FIRST*** TIME 'ROUND FINDING FIGHTERS FOR THE BRAWLERS' LEAGUE?

WOULD YOU ***WANT*** TO BE RECRUITED BY SOMEONE WHO DOESN'T EVEN KNOW WHAT THEY'RE ***DOING?***

OH NO! I'M SURE YOU'RE ***VERY*** GOOD AT YOUR JOB, MR. GRIMTHORNE!

THAT I AM. UNLESS YOU'RE TELLING ME I'M ***WRONG*** ABOUT YOU LOT BEING UP FOR THIS.

REMEMBER, I ONLY GET PAID IF ***YOU*** WIN.

WE'RE UP FOR IT. AND ***ALSO*** GETTING PAID.

VOX MACHINA. WE'RE ***REGISTERING.***

SINCE YOU'RE ***UNKNOWNS*** IN THE BRAWLERS' LEAGUE, THERE WILL BE A LOT OF FOLKS BETTING AGAINST YOU.

WHICH MAKES YOU RATHER PROFITABLE WILDCARDS. ***IF*** YOU WIN THIS.

ALL RIGHT. LET'S GET THIS OVER WITH AND GET PAID.

WHO WILL WE BE FIGHTING?

A GROUP KNOWN AS *GORESHON'S FIST.*

THEY'RE WARMING UP NOW.

...OH.

THEY LOOK... TOUGH.

WE'VE *DEALT* WITH TOUGH BEFORE.

NEXT UP, *GORESHON'S FIST* VERSUS *VOX MACHINA!*

AND THAT'S YOUR CUE!

ALL RIGHT. WHAT WE *NEED* IS A PLAN OF ATTACK.

FIRST OFF, WE'LL--

LET'S DO THIS!

RIGHT. GUESS WE'RE JUST WINGING IT, THEN...

GORESHON'S FIST CONTINUE TO KEEP NEWCOMERS VOX MACHINA OFF-BALANCE!

NICE TRY.

OH NO YOU--

-:GURK:-

THAT'S *MINE*, THANK YOU.

YOU'RE--

GAAAH!

...WELCOME.

THIS *REALLY* ISN'T GOING TO GO WELL FOR YOU.

TOLD YOU.

RRARGH!

WATCH IT! I'M ON *YOUR* SIDE!

SORRY, LONG NAME GUY.

UM, THANK YOU?

I DID HAVE THAT ONE, THOUGH...

KRAK

OW!

JUST HOLD STILL.

UH OH...

DID YOU *SEE* THAT? WHAM, BAM, *NO THANK YOU* MA'AM!

QUITE IMPRESSIVE, IF I DO SAY SO MYSELF.

THERE, ALL BETTER.

NOW, WHAT WAS THAT?

...NOTHING. YOU HAD TO BE THERE.

"NOW'S NOT THE TIME TO GET COCKY."

FIGHTS GET **TOUGHER** EACH ROUND. AND IF YOU DON'T LEARN TO **WORK TOGETHER,** YOU'LL **NEVER** MAKE IT THROUGH.

OH, DON'T WORRY. TRUE **MUSICIANS** LIKE OURSELVES KNOW HOW TO SING IN **PERFECT HARMONY.**

SING? I STILL GET TO SMASH, RIGHT?

OF **COURSE,** GROG.

WHO IS IT HERE THAT WE SHOULD **REALLY** BE KEEPING AN EYE ON?

YES, WHO WOULD YOU SAY OUR MOST LIKELY COMPETITION IS?

WELL, IF MY MONEY WASN'T ALREADY ON **YOU...**

...IT WOULD BE ON **LORAN THE BEAR** AND HIS PEOPLE.

OH YEAH. **THAT** GUY.

I **REALLY** WANT TO FIGHT THAT GUY...

THEM? THEY DON'T SEEM *THAT* MUCH OF A THREAT...

THAT'S IT. NIGHTY-NIGHT TIME.

THANKS, LORAN!

LOOKING FORWARD TO KICKING YOUR ASS TOO.

IF YOU EVEN *MAKE* IT THAT FAR, BIG BOY.

OH, WE'RE TAKING THIS *ALL THE WAY.*

...BUT I *AM* BIG. *THAT* PART IS CORRECT.

...HOW MANY FIGHTS DO WE HAVE TO...YOU KNOW. FIGHT?

I'M NOT SURE THE COIN WE STAND TO MAKE HERE IS WORTH ***THIS*** MUCH HASSLE.

I'M WONDERING IF WE SHOULD JUST CUT OUR LOSSES NOW.

IT MIGHT BE HARD CONVINCING GROG TO LEAVE EARLY.

OR ***EVER.***

GOOD TO HEAR YOU LITTLE LADIES ARE FINALLY SEEING SENSE.

WOULD HAVE BEEN A ***SHAME*** IF THE ***SCARLET QUORUM*** HAD TO HURT PRETTY THINGS LIKE YOURSELF.

I SUPPOSE ANOTHER ROUND WOULDN'T HURT.

OH, IT'S GOING TO HURT, ALL RIGHT.

JUST NOT ***US.***

NEXT UP, VOX MACHINA VERSUS...THE *SCARLET QUORUM!*

ALL RIGHT. *THIS* TIME, WE DON'T LET THEM SEPARATE US.

STAND STRONG. STAND TOGETHER.

THIS IS WHAT YOU ALL CALL STICKING TOGETHER?

PERHAPS NEXT TIME, WE SPEND THE WEEK TRAINING TOGETHER...

THIS IS JUST THE VERY BEST DAY!

I'M GLAD YOU'RE HAVING FUN, GROG.

THAT'S QUITE ENOUGH OF THAT.

TING

TINK

GOOD JOB! YOU WERE *SO* CLOSE TO HITTING HIM!

THANKS, KEYLETH...

AND OF COURSE, IT'S UP TO ME TO SAVE EVERYONE, *AS USUAL...*

WHAT?!

WOOOOSH

RAAAH!

GAAAAAAH!

THAT LOOKS REALLY PAINFUL...

YOU'RE WELCOME.

CRONCH

GROG, ARE YOU ALL RIGHT? DO YOU NEED ME TO HEAL YOU?

NAH, MOST OF IT'S NOT MINE.

THAT WENT SO WELL! I THINK WE ***REALLY*** ARE GETTING BETTER AT THIS! GOOD THING WE STUCK WITH IT!

AS I SAID BEFORE, ***YOU'RE WELCOME.***

HEY YOU. LORAN THE BEAR...

...LOOKS LIKE WE'RE COMIN' FOR ***YOU*** NEXT.

BRING IT ON.

HEY, THERE'S MORE OF US THAN THEM! THAT ISN'T A FAIR FIGHT!

ALL THE EASIER FOR US TO WIN THAT PRIZE MONEY.

WAIT, GROG CAN COUNT? THAT'S WORRYING...

IF WE'RE GONNA WIN THIS WHOLE THING, WE'RE GONNA DO IT ***RIGHT.***

WHAT GOOD IS THE PRIZE IF WE DON'T ***PROVE*** WE REALLY ARE THE STRONGEST.

IT'S ***MONEY.*** MONEY IS ***ALWAYS*** GOOD.

DON'T WORRY YOUR DELICATE HEAD NONE.

YOU WANNA FIGHT SEVEN?

WE GOT SEVEN.

GUESS WE DIDN'T HIT THAT GUY ***NEARLY*** HARD ENOUGH YET.

WE'RE GONNA KICK YOUR ASSES *SO* HARD THAT YOU'RE GONNA HAVE TO HIRE US TO GO ON A QUEST TO *FIND* YOUR ASSES.

YEAH, GOOD LUCK WITH THAT.

RAAAAAAAHHH!!

A *SHAWM?* WHO PLAYS A *SHAWM?*

IT'S NOT THE *SIZE* OF THE INSTRUMENT.

IT'S HOW YOU *USE IT.*

GONNA LOSE.

YEAH YOU ARE.

NO, I MEAN YOU'RE GONNA LOSE.

OH NO, DISPELLED...

SCANLAN! YOU HAVE TO STOP HIM!

KEYLETH!

HOW--

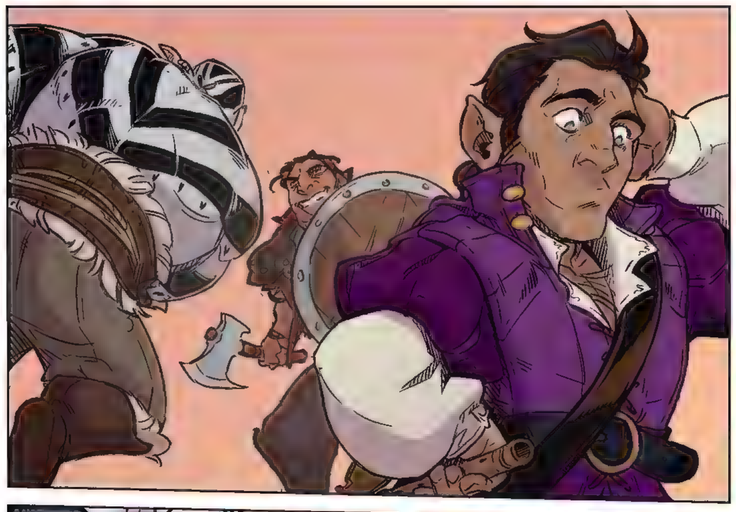
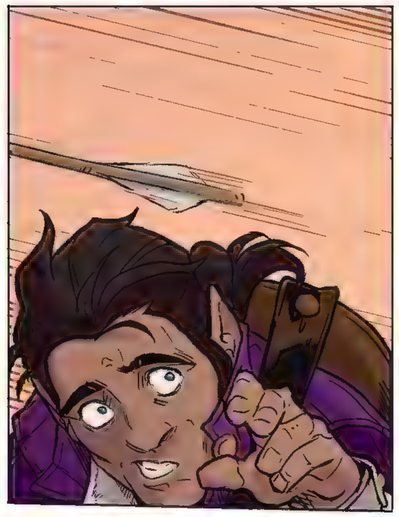
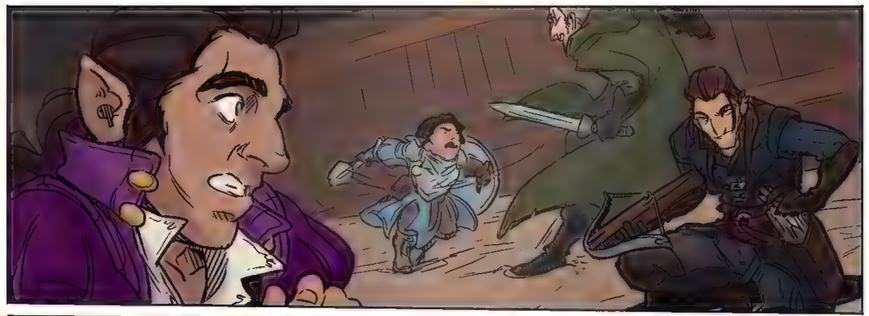
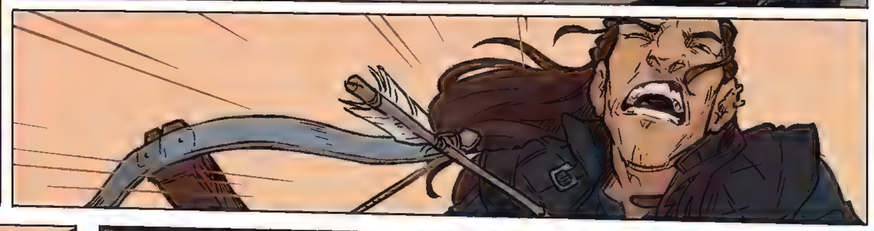
FFFF

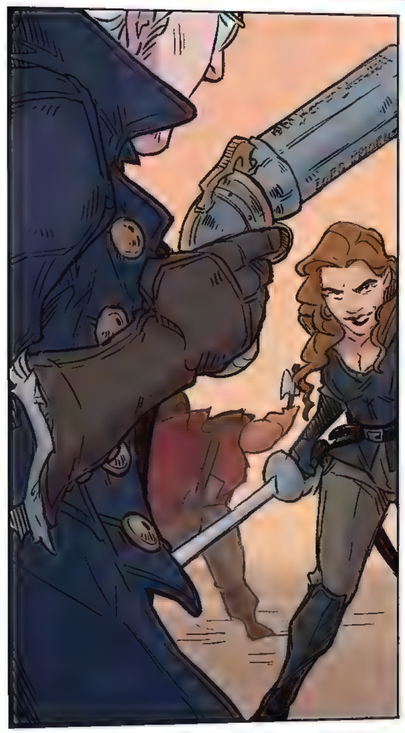
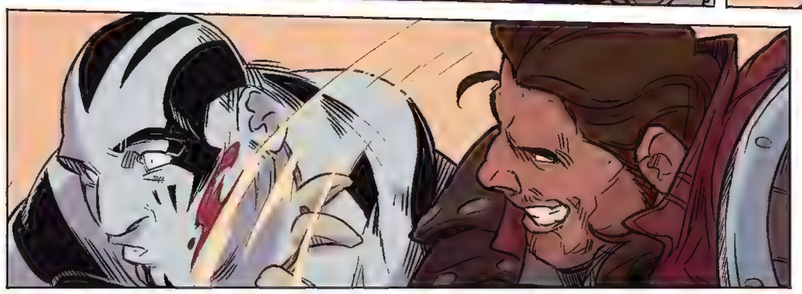
STUB...

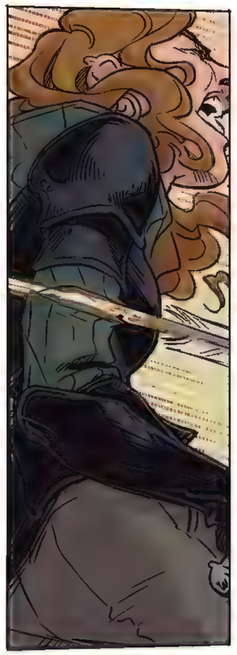
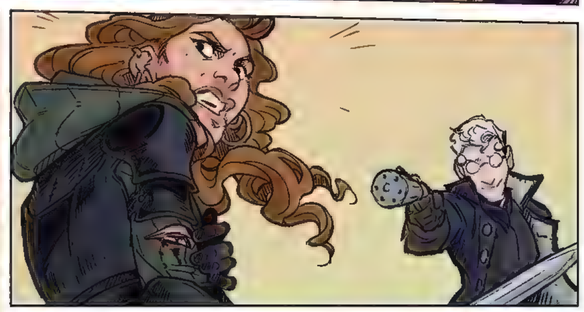
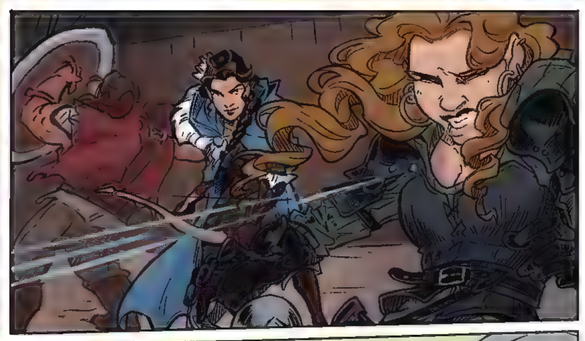
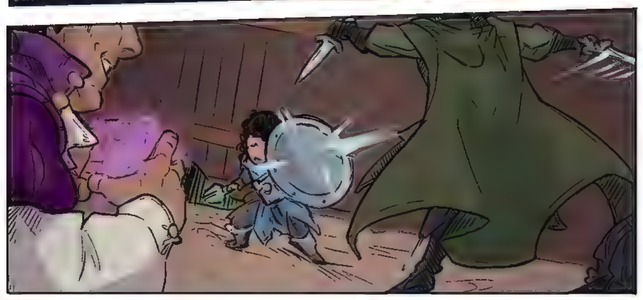
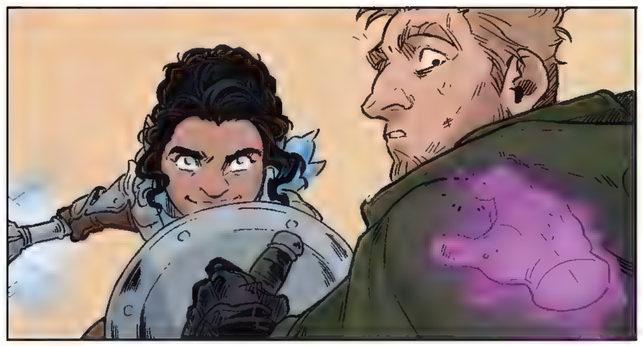
HMMM.

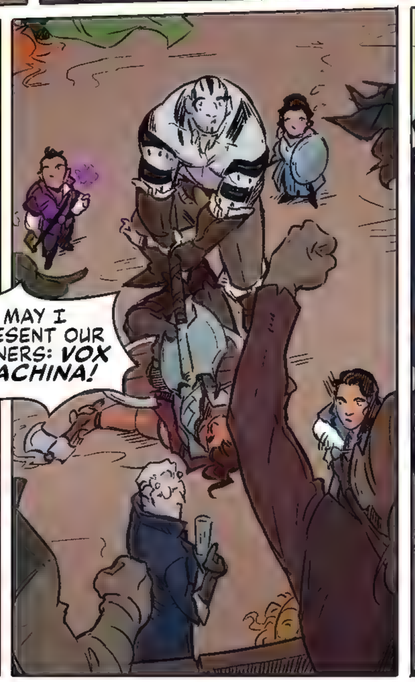
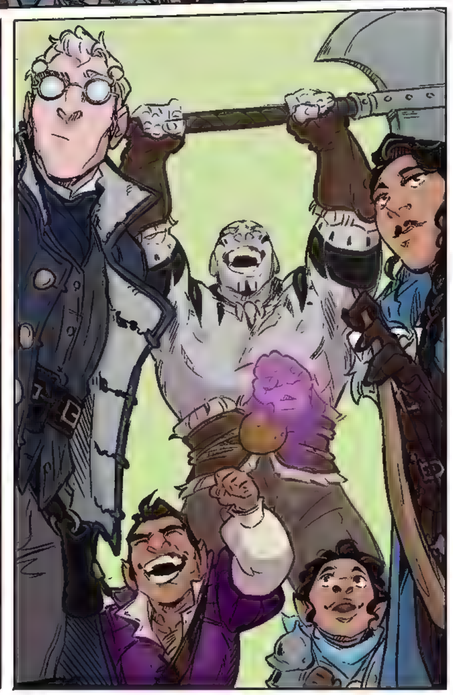
OH NO YOU DON'T...

I DIDN'T THINK I HIT HIM *THAT* HARD.

MAY I PRESENT OUR WINNERS: VOX MACHINA!



I JUST WANT YOU TO KNOW THAT THAT WAS A ***VERY BEAUTIFUL*** AND ***VERY MEANINGFUL*** TIME WE SPENT TOGETHER.

MOSTLY BECAUSE ***I WON.***

YOUR SHARE OF THE WINNINGS, AS PROMISED.

IF YOU'RE INTERESTED IN THE NEXT TOURNAMENT--

WE'LL KEEP IT IN MIND.

...WE WIN?

WE DID.

S'GOOD...

GIVE ME JUST A MOMENT. I SHOULD BE ABLE TO CLEAR THE SEDATIVES OUT OF THEIR BLOOD-STREAMS.

GOOD, BECAUSE THEN WE'RE GOING TO GET THEM AND OURSELVES ***COMPLETELY WINTER'S CREST WASTED!***

TONIGHT, ***VOX MACHINA,*** WE CELEBRATE THE HOLIDAY LIKE ***CHAMPIONS!***

HOLIDAYS ARE SO MUCH BETTER WHEN YOU HAVE *MONEY.*

MOST THINGS ARE, DARLING.

...CELEBRATING THE FALL OF ERREVON THE RIMELORD, AS WE DO EVERY YEAR.

BUT THIS HOLIDAY IS ABOUT ***FAR MORE*** THAN SOME AGE-OLD BATTLE.

HISTORY SERVES TO REMIND US OF THE ***HEIGHTS*** THAT WE HAVE RISEN TO.

JUST HOW ***STRONG*** WE ARE WHEN WE WORK TOGETHER.

BECAUSE THAT IS ***REALLY*** WHAT THIS HOLIDAY IS ALL ABOUT, ISN'T IT?

THE IMPORTANCE OF ***HELPING*** ONE ANOTHER.

THAT WE CAN OVERCOME ***ANY*** CHALLENGE WHEN WE WORK TOGETHER AS A COMMUNITY.

CLAP

CLAP

CLAP

IT LOOKS LIKE I'M JUST IN TIME.

NOT IF YOU WANTED TO ***MISS*** THE SPEECH.

ONE MOMENT, FRIENDS...

OH, HOW DELIGHTFUL! IT SEEMS WE HAVE A SURPRISE GIFT FROM ***REALMSEER ESKIL RYNDARIEN!***

A MONUMENT TO CELEBRATE THE OCCASION!

DOESN'T SOUND MUCH LIKE HIM.

MAYBE HE FOUND A BIT OF HOLIDAY SPIRIT?

NO!

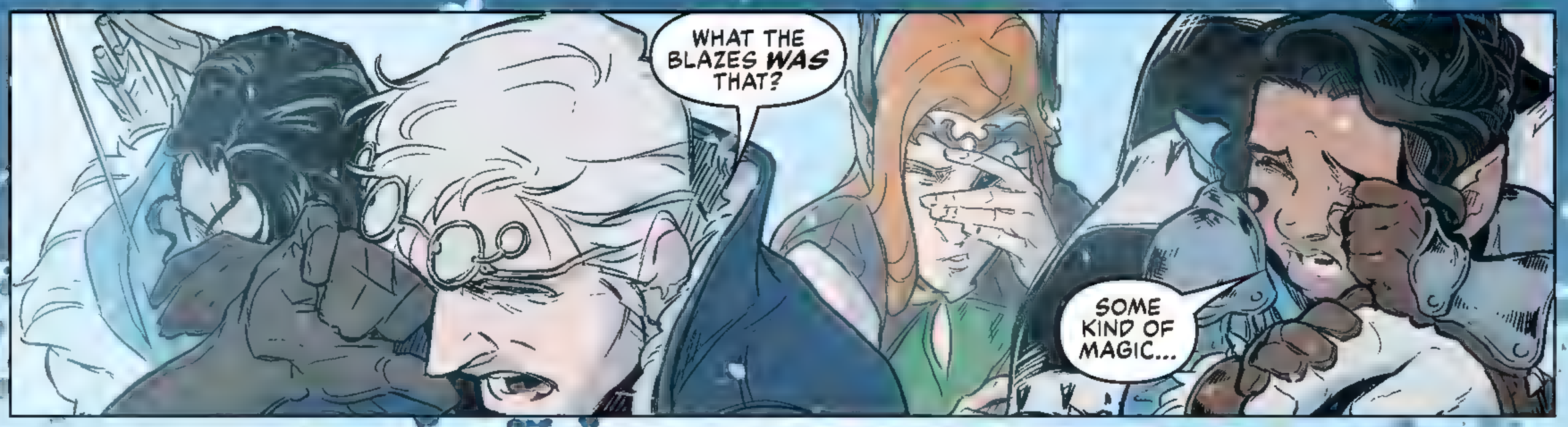
HEY! WE KNOW THAT GUY, RIGHT?

REALMSEER ESKIL. HE ONLY *SAVED YOUR LIFE,* GROG.

WHAT'S HE--?

LET ME THROUGH!

SHATTERED


WHAT THE BLAZES WAS THAT?
SOME KIND OF MAGIC...

VAX?!
YAAAAAAUHK!

UM, GUYS...
...I THINK SOMETHING BAD HAPPENED.

HE...MUST HAVE CAST SOME KIND OF WARDING SPELL.

HE SACRIFICED HIMSELF TO *PROTECT* US.

HE ISN'T THE ONLY ONE...

IDIOT.

TELL ME...

HOW LONG HAS IT BEEN? WHERE AM I?

WHAT DO YOU CALL THIS PLACE?

YOU FROZE A TOWN'S WORTH OF PEOPLE...

...AND THEN ASK FOR DIRECTIONS?!

SUCH EMOTION...

...OVER SUCH TRIFLES.

NOW. ARE YOU GOING TO ANSWER MY QUESTION?

NO.

WE'RE GOING TO KICK YOUR ASS.

SORRY, NAKED LADY. THAT'S HOW IT'S GOTTA GO.

SUCH A SHAME.

FWOOOOOOSH

CAN'T-- MOVE--

MAGIC.

NOW, IT'S A *SIMPLE* QUESTION. JUST TELL ME--

NO!

OOF!

IT'S STILL TOO SOON.

NEED MORE TIME... TO GATHER MY STRENGTH...

CURSE HIM!

NGGGH.

SHE'S GETTING AWAY!

TRINKET, STAY WITH VAX!

MAYBE WE SHOULD--

...OR NOT.

THAT'S MY *FOOT.*

OW!

WATCH THE *HANDS,* PLEASE!

OH, WOW.

UM, WHERE'S THE PORTAL?

DOESN'T MATTER. NOT UNTIL WE FIND *HER.*

—

DO YOU HEAR THAT?

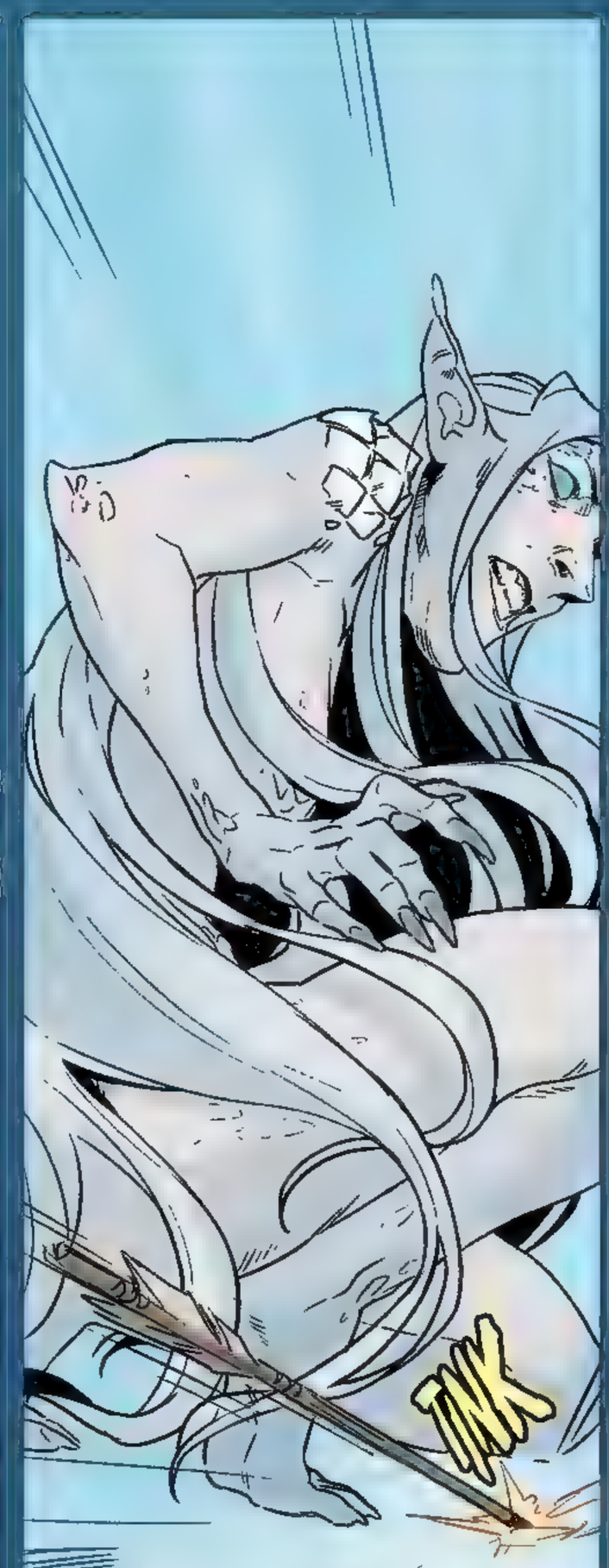
PERHAPS WE SHOULD STICK TOGETHER.

THEN *KEEP UP.*

YOU SHOULD STICK CLOSE TO ME.

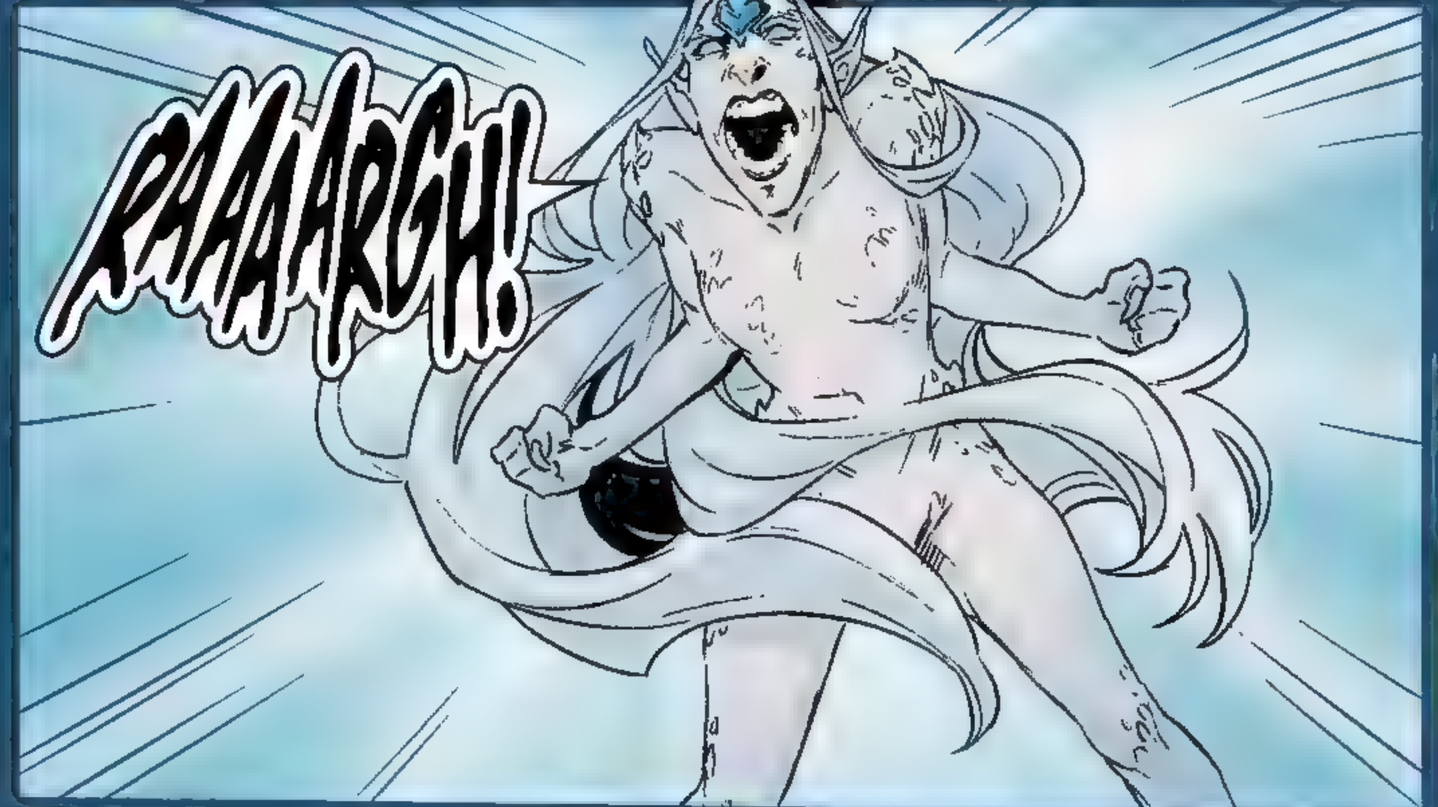
YOU KNOW, FOR THE WARMTH.

ERREVON...


TINK

THAT WAS A WARNING SHOT.
WE'RE TAKING YOU BACK. NOW.

KRAK


RAAARGH!

THAT'S A BAD SOUND, RIGHT?

YES, GROG. *VERY* BAD.

SHE'S GETTING AWAY!

LET'S WORRY ABOUT *US* GETTING AWAY.

THERE! WE'RE ALMOST OUT!

HURRY!

OOOF!

SMASH

PIKE!

OW.

THANK YOU!

RUUUMBLE

WELL. NO GOING BACK NOW.

THERE! IS THAT HER?

WHERE DID SHE GO?

NOT USED TO WOMEN RUNNING ***AWAY*** LIKE THAT.

SOMETHING ODD ABOUT HER MOVEMENT. ALMOST LIKE SHE'S NOT ***USED*** TO RUNNING.

SHE'S THAT WAY.

ARE YOU CERTAIN?

I'D STAKE MY BROTHER'S LIFE ON IT.

CAREFUL. FEEL THAT SHIFT IN THE WIND?

THERE'S A STEEP DROP UP AHEAD.

YOU FOLLOWED ME.

LIKE POOR LOST LAMBS.

HEY! IF THERE WAS ANY MUTTON HERE, I'D *KNOW.*

HOW PRECIOUS.

STEADY.

YOU ARE OF *EXANDRIA*, ARE YOU NOT?

I WAS SENT THERE, A VERY LONG TIME AGO.

I SERVED AS A SCOUT FOR MY LORD.

HELPING FIND THE WEAKEST SPOTS TO EXPLOIT IN HIS CONQUEST.

UNTIL I WAS BROUGHT LOW BY MORTAL HANDS.

OH HEY! *WE'RE* MORTAL!

MAYBE NOT THE BEST TIME TO POINT THAT OUT.

WHAT WERE YOU DOING IN EXANDRIA?

WHAT IS IT YOU WANT?

I'VE SLEPT FOR SO LONG. CENTURIES, PERHAPS.

AND YET, STILL I'VE AWOKEN TOO SOON. I SHOULD BE FAR STRONGER.

IF I COULD REACH MY LORD ERREVON'S FRIGID PALACE, I COULD BE RESTORED.

WOULD YOU HELP ME? WILL YOU SERVE THE ICE LORD AND HIS IMMINENT DOMINION?

NO. WE'RE GOING TO *KILL* YOU.

ALTHOUGH MAYBE IF YOU UNFREEZE EVERYONE IN WESTRUUN...

...WE WOULDN'T *HAVE* TO?

YOU COMPLAIN ABOUT A MERE *FLURRY?*

MY LORD AND I SHALL BRING *ETERNAL WINTER* TO YOUR SAD LITTLE REALM.

SORRY, BUT THAT'S *DEFINITELY* NOT GOING TO HAPPEN.

SO WE *ARE* GOING TO KILL HER THEN, RIGHT?

RIGHT.

AHAHAHA!

YOU THINK TO STOP THE *MIGHT OF ERREVON?*

OH, YOU REALLY ARE ADORABLE.

DID SHE JUST--?

PROBABLY BECAUSE WE'RE SO SCARY.

PHWOOSH

I'M *FAMISHED* AFTER SUCH A LONG SLEEP. YOU SHALL ALL HAVE THE HONOR OF BEING THE *FIRST* TO FILL THE BELLY...

...OF *SKYSUNDER*, HERALD OF THE RIMELORD!

SKYSUNDER? HERALD OF THE RIMELORD?

SOUNDS KIND OF ***PRETENTIOUS,*** DON'T YOU THINK?

MAYBE YOU SHOULDN'T ***ANTAGONIZE*** THE DRAGON, SCANLAN?

SHE STARTED IT WITH THE WHOLE THREATENING-TO-EAT-US THING!

NO, SHE STARTED IT WHEN SHE FROZE MY BROTHER.

AND A WHOLE TOWN FULL OF PEOPLE.

...THEM TOO, YES.

ALWAYS WANTED TO KILL ONE OF THESE.

AREN'T YOU ALL JUST SO PRECIOUS.

YOU WILL BE MY MOST ENTERTAINING MEAL IN AGES!

WHERE DID SHE GO?!

IT'S A ***DRAGON.*** IT SHOULDN'T BE ***THAT*** HARD TO--

RAAAGH!

GROG!

AW, PIKEY, I'M OKAY.

IT'S JUST A ***LITTLE*** DRAGON.

FREEZE YOUR BROTHER, DID I, HALF-ELF?

WOULD YOU CARE TO JOIN HIM?

WHERE ARE YOU?!

OOF!

VEX, ARE YOU ALL RIGHT?

C... COLD...

THAT I CAN HELP WITH.

ANYONE HAVE EYES ON THE DRAGON YET?

HEY, DRAGON LADY! WHY DON'T YOU COME DOWN HERE FOR A NICE CHAT AND I ***TOTALLY*** WON'T HIT YOU WITH THIS AXE.

I'M LYING.

EVERLIGHT, PLEASE GUIDE US.

HEY BABY, NO NEED TO GIVE US THE COLD SHOULDER.

I FOR ONE HAVE ALWAYS LOVED LARGER WOMEN.

WHAT ARE YOU DOING? SHE'S A DRAGON.

WELL, SHE WAS LADY SHAPED BEFORE.

THERE SHE IS!

VERY, VERY LADY SHAPED...

SCANLAN?

...COMPLETELY NAKED...

-SIGH-

SORRY, DID YOU SAY SOMETHING?

NOPE.

THERE WE ARE.

THUP

BANG

SKREEEEE!

NICE SHOT.

NOT BAD YOURSELF.

AND THE NEXT SHOT IS ***MINE.***

AND BY SHOT I MEAN HITTING IT ***REALLY HARD*** WITH MY AXE.

RAAAAARGH!

OOF!

EXCELLENT SHOT.

ENOUGH!

YOU ALL ARE NOTHING!

AN INSIGNIFICANT MEAL TO BE FORGOTTEN.

IF WE'RE SO *INSIGNIFICANT,* DARLING...

...WHY ARE YOU SO *ANGRY?*

DIE!

YOU DARE?!

WHO ARE YOU, WHO THINKS THEY CAN COMMAND THE VERY SKY?

A DAUGHTER OF THE WIND.

AND YOU HURT MY FRIENDS.

KAKOOM

AAAGH!

NOW!

AXE!

GAAAAAAAH!

KRAK KRAK KRAK

KRAAAK

DID WE KILL IT?

LOOKS *REASONABLY* DEAD TO ME.

YEAH, I DON'T THINK SHE'S COMING BACK FROM THAT.

UH...DIDN'T LOOK LIKE SHE WAS CARRYING A LOT OF GOLD.

I'M NOT *LOOKING* FOR GOLD.

THAT'S A FIRST...

YES.

THERE YOU ARE.

AH, YES. A *GEM.*

COMPLETELY DIFFERENT THAN GOLD.

A *MAGIC* GEM THAT OPENED THE *PORTAL* THAT *BROUGHT* US HERE.

UNLESS YOU WERE PLANNING ON *STAYING* ON THE GLACIER.

UM. NO. THIS PLACE IS TERRIBLE.

NOW, *HOW* DOES THIS THING--?

DIDN'T THINK THAT WOULD WORK...

THERE. LET'S GO.

VEX, ARE YOU *SURE* THAT WILL TAKE US BACK TO WESTRUUN?

WELL...NOT *EXACTLY...*

WE CAN THROW A ROCK AT IT!

GROG, I DON'T THINK THROWING A ROCK AT IT WILL HELP.

YEAH IT WILL!

IF SOMEONE ON THE OTHER SIDE YELLS "OW!" AND WE RECOGNIZE THE VOICE, WE KNOW IT'S WESTRUUN!

NOT IF THEY'RE *STILL FROZEN.*

FASCINATING...

LAH BLAH BLAH LAH BLAH REALLY BLAH *BIG* ROCK B LAH BLAH BLAH

LAH BLAH BL AH BLAH BLAH H NO CHOICE B H BLAH BLA

COME ON. WE'RE GETTING *OUTTA* HERE.

STILL THINK A ROCK WAS A GOOD IDEA...

RIGHT. THAT'S A *LATER* PROBLEM.

WE DID IT.

WE'RE BACK.

VAX?

VEX!

I'M JUST SAYING, IF I'D HIT VAX WITH THE ROCK--

IT'S OVER, GROG.

IT WASN'T A BAD IDEA, GROG.

AND THERE WILL BE PLENTY MORE CHANCES TO THROW ROCKS AT THINGS.

PROMISE?

THANK YOU FOR...YOU KNOW.

SAVING YOUR ASS?

I ALWAYS WILL, STUBBY.

SOUNDS LIKE YOU'RE BACK TO NORMAL.

A LITTLE COLD, STILL. BUT THE ICE THAT WAS HOLDING EVERYONE SUDDENLY VAN--

FWUMP

YES, YES. IT'S GOOD TO SEE YOU, TOO.

THANKS FOR KEEPING HIM SAFE.

IT'S *HIM!*

HE'S THE ONE TO BLAME FOR ALL OF THIS!

I BEG YOUR PARDON?

THAT BLUE STONE! THEY SAID IT WAS ***YOUR*** GIFT!

WHATEVER MAGICS CAUSED THIS WERE BROUGHT HERE BY ***YOU!***

NOW I DID ***NO*** SUCH--

ARREST THAT MAN!

THIS COULD GET UGLY ***VERY*** FAST.

HEY! THEY CAN'T DO THAT TO OUR FRIEND!

HE'S THE ONE WHO DID ***THIS*** TO ME!

PUTTING IT LIKE ***THAT*** MIGHT NOT HELP HIM MUCH, GROG.

I JUST DON'T SEE THE REALMSEER DOING SOMETHING ***HORRIBLE*** LIKE THIS. WORKING WITH THE RIMELORD?

SOMEONE EASILY COULD HAVE USED HIS NAME TO COVER UP THEIR OWN ROLE.

FRAME JOB. ***TYPICAL.***

IF IT WASN'T FOR THE REALMSEER, GROG WOULDN'T BE HERE TODAY.

WE OWE HIM.

AND IF SOMEONE WENT TO THE TROUBLE OF FREEZING A WHOLE TOWN BY RESURRECTING A ***FUCKING DRAGON...***

...I SINCERELY DOUBT THEY'LL STOP THERE.

MY GOOD MAN, WE HAVE REASON TO BELIEVE THAT ESKIL RYNDARIEN IS ***NOT*** THE ONE RESPONSIBLE FOR THE ATTACK.

THAT THERE IS SOMETHING FAR ***DARKER*** AFOOT.

HAHAHAHAHA

TAKEN IN BY CHILDREN'S STORIES

THE REASON FOR THE SEASON

CENTURIES TOO LATE

WHO ***IS*** RESPONSIBLE, THEN?

ERR, WE BELIEVE IT'S ACTUALLY...THE RIMELORD.

OR SOMEONE ACTING ON HIS BEHALF.

WE'LL *PROVE* THAT SOMEONE IS HELPING THE RIMELORD.

AND THEN WE'LL *STOP* THEM.

MAYBE WITH A ROCK.

"I HAVE ABSOLUTELY *NO IDEA* WHO COULD HAVE DONE THIS."

DO YOU HAVE ANY ENEMIES?

OR WHY THEY WOULD CHOOSE TO USE *MY* NAME.

SLEPT WITH ANYONE'S WIVES AND/OR DAUGHTERS?

ONE DOES NOT AMASS THE POWER I HAVE WITHOUT MAKING A FEW ENEMIES ALONG THE WAY.

HOWEVER, IT'S BEEN AN AGE SINCE I... RUFFLED ANYONE'S FEATHERS.

AND NONE OF THEM ARE THE TYPE TO LET THE WHOLE CITY OF WESTRUUN BE COLLATERAL DAMAGE.

YEAH, ESPECIALLY IF THEY'RE BIRDS.

Y'KNOW, I DO STILL OWE YOU.

WHAT WITH THE WHOLE KEEPING-MY-SOUL-FROM-GETTING-CONSUMED-BY-EVIL STUFF.

WE COULD HELP YOU ESCAPE, AND THEN--

CREEEEEEEEEEE

NO!

THANK YOU, LAD. BUT NO.

THIS IS MY HOME. I HAVE NO INTENTION OF *RUNNING AWAY* FROM IT.

ESPECIALLY FOR A CRIME I DIDN'T COMMIT.

OKAY, OKAY.

SORRY ABOUT YOUR BARS.

CREEEEEEEEEE

REALMSEER ESKIL, THE BEING THAT EMERGED FROM THE STONE WAS A *WHITE DRAGON.*

SHE CALLED HERSELF *SKYSUNDER,* IF THAT HELPS AT ALL.

SKYSUNDER IS THE DRAGON THAT WAS ***SEALED*** BENEATH THE FROSTWEALD BY THE EARLY ARCANA PANSOPHICAL AT THE DEFEAT OF ERREVON.

SHE WAS THE REASON THE AREA WAS CAUGHT IN A PERPETUAL WINTER.

WITH HER DEAD AND GONE, THAT WINTER WILL SURELY FADE.

GUESS THEY'LL NEED A NEW NAME.

"SCANLANTOWN" HAS A NICE RING TO IT...

SHE USED ***THIS*** TO TRAVEL TO...WHEREVER THE HELLS IT WAS SHE TRAVELED TO.

WE THOUGHT YOU MIGHT BE ABLE TO TELL US WHAT IT IS.

MAY I SEE IT?

THIS LOOKS TO BE A FRAGMENT OF A ***THRESHOLD CREST STONE.***

THEY ARE USED TO PULL PEOPLE BETWEEN THE PLANES. AND SOMETIMES BETWEEN ***PLACES*** AS WELL.

JUDGING BY ITS DULL APPEARANCE, IT SEEMS TO BE CURRENTLY DRAINED OF ITS MAGIC.

WE HAVE ONE OTHER CLUE.

THE NOTE THAT THE MARGRAVE RECEIVED, INDICATING THAT THE STONE WAS A GIFT FROM ***YOU.***

I TOOK THE LIBERTY OF ***APPROPRIATING*** IT FROM HIS POSSESSION.

THESE SHODDY BINDINGS DON'T MAKE CASTING ***EASY...***

...BUT LET ME SEE IF I CAN SCRY THE ***TRUE*** SOURCE...

"I SEE SOMEONE...

"A FIGURE IN A CLOAK.

"I BELIEVE THEY'RE... ***UNDERGROUND.***

"AND THEY AREN'T ALONE.

"ONE OF THEM IS SHOWING...

"...A BRAND..."

WELL...

...THAT WAS RATHER *UNEXPECTED.*

A BRAND, YOU SAID?

YES. AND QUITE A FAMILIAR ONE.

IT'S THE SYMBOL USED BY A DANGEROUS GUILD OF THIEVES THAT OPERATES ALL ACROSS TAL'DOREI.

ON THE BRIGHT SIDE, I *MAY* BE ABLE TO FIND THE ONE RESPONSIBLE FOR THIS MESS.

REALLY? HOW?

THEY ARE KNOWN AS *THE CLASP.*

I SHOULD HAVE KNOWN...

THAT'S A GOOD QUESTION.

AND THAT WAS A ***WE*** YOU MEANT TO SAY JUST THEN. ***RIGHT?***

ACTUALLY, NO. IT ***WASN'T.***

BUT VAX, YOU HEARD WHAT THE REALMSEER SAID. THE CLASP IS ***DANGEROUS.***

YEAH! YOU EXPECT US TO STAY HERE AND ***NOT*** PUNCH PEOPLE WHO NEED PUNCHING?

AND IF I DO THIS ALONE, I CAN POTENTIALLY AVOID THE PUNCHING ALTOGETHER.

I'LL BE BACK SOON.

DON'T YOU--

--DO THAT ASSHOLE ***VANISHING THING*** YOU ALWAYS DO.

HALT! WHO GOES THERE?!

A FRIEND. IF YOU'LL ALLOW ME TO SHOW YOU SOME IDENTIFICATION...

NO FUNNY BUSINESS.

OF COURSE NOT. HONOR AMONG THIEVES AND ALL THAT.

YOU ARE WELCOME HERE, FRIEND.

...A FOOL FOR THINKING HE COULD HIDE FROM THE CLASP...

ZAP

...FILCHED IT RIGHT OFF HER PRETTY NECK...

...AND THEN I STABBED HIM AGAIN...

...NO IDEA HIS LITTLE DELIVERY WOULD FREEZE THE WHOLE DAMN TOWN.

SHOULDA SEEN THE LOOK ON FETCH'S FACE.

...ALWAYS DOES THIS.

WELL, BEING INVISIBLE IS KIND OF HIS *SPECIALTY.*

YEAH, LIKE HOW I'M THE *ATTRACTIVE* ONE OF THE GROUP.

BLAH BLAH BLAH DELUSIONAL BLAH BLAH BLAH BLAH BLAH SEXY BLAH BLAH BUTT BLAH BLAH BLAH BLAH

WAIT, IS THAT...

THE DWARF WOMAN'S MISSING SON!

I THINK I FOUND HIM!

WHO? VAX?

THERE YOU ARE!

YOUR MOTHER'S BEEN SO WORRIED ABOUT--

Y'KNOW MY MOTHER?

OLD BAT OWES ME MONEY.

NO, SIR! I...SORRY!

I THOUGHT YOU WERE...THERE'S A LITTLE BOY WHO'S MISSING.

GOTTA BE *KIDDING* ME...

I'M REALLY VERY SORRY!

I DIDN'T REALLY THINK *THAT* WAS YOUR TYPE, KEYLETH.

DID I HEAR RIGHT? YOU FIND MISSING CHILDREN?

MY DAUGHTER, SHE'D BE SIX YEARS OLD...WENT MISSING NIGH ON A YEAR AGO.

NO ONE HAS BEEN ABLE TO HELP.

DO YOU HAVE ANY CLUES? ANYTHING THAT MIGHT TELL YOU WHAT HAPPENED?

JUST THAT SHE'D MADE A NEW FRIEND NOT LONG BEFORE SHE VANISHED.

A CHILD WITH BLACK HAIR AND GOLDEN EYES.

"NEVER SAW THAT OTHER CHILD AGAIN, EITHER."

AND WHAT DO WE HAVE HERE?

I'M A MEMBER OF THE CLASP.

OBVIOUSLY, IF YOU'RE HERE.

WHAT I *DON'T* KNOW IS WHY YOU APPEAR TO BE *SPYING* ON YOUR FELLOWS.

I'M STILL NEW. GETTING THE LAY OF THE LAND.

WANTED TO HEAR THE GOSSIP. GET A FEEL FOR WHO I COULD TRUST.

ALL OF US. AND *NONE* OF US. AS YOU WOULD EXPECT.

AS FOR THE GOSSIP... HEAR ANYTHING GOOD?

A PARTICULARLY *HILARIOUS* TALE ABOUT A BLUE STONE THAT WAS MORE THAN IT SEEMED.

DELIVERED BY SOMEONE KNOWN AS *FETCH.*

AND WHAT'S YOUR INTEREST?

I WAS *IN* THE TOWN WHEN THE STONE FROZE IT SOLID.

THE NAME IS *SPIRELING FETCH.*

BEEN FOLLOWING YOU SINCE YOU ARRIVED. TOOK YOU LONG ENOUGH TO NOTICE ME.

WELL THEN. I'D OWE YOU AN APOLOGY, IF IT WEREN'T *BUSINESS.*

AND IF I WAS THE APOLOGIZING TYPE.

...I SHALL ASPIRE TO BE MORE AWARE NEXT TIME.

YOUR BIT OF *JUST BUSINESS* NEARLY WIPED OUT AN ENTIRE CITY.

AND I CAN'T SAY I'M PLEASED ABOUT THAT. A FROZEN CITY IS HARDLY A *PROFITABLE* CITY.

SEEMS LIKE *SOMEONE* WAS WILLING TO LET THE CLASP TAKE THE BLAME FOR THE STONE.

JUST SUBTLE ENOUGH TO NOT INSULT MY INTELLIGENCE.

I *LIKE* YOU.

THAT STONE THAT CAUSED SO MUCH TROUBLE WAS AN ESPECIALLY ***PROFITABLE*** DELIVERY.

ENOUGH MONEY TO BE "***NO QUESTIONS ASKED.***"

SO YOU HAVE NO IDEA WHERE IT CAME FROM, THEN?

WELL, THE DELIVERY WAS SENT THROUGH OUR EMON HEADQUARTERS.

AND THE WORD IS IT SOMEHOW HAS TIES TO THE POLITICAL HIGHER-UPS IN EMON. BUT I'VE NO IDEA ***WHO.***

SOMEONE INTERESTED IN THE REALMSEER TAKING THE BLAME FOR IT.

I OWE HIM A ***DEBT.*** IF WE COULD FIND THE ONE RESPONSIBLE AND CLEAR HIS NAME...

OH, CLEARING HIS NAME WOULD BE EASY ENOUGH FOR THE CLASP TO ARRANGE. WE ***ALWAYS*** TAKE CARE OF OUR OWN.

WELL. WHEN IT'S ***VIABLE,*** AT LEAST.

OF COURSE, A DEBT EARNED IS A DEBT REMEMBERED.

AND THE CLASP ***NEVER*** FORGETS.

...ALL RIGHT.

EXCELLENT.

I'M *SURE* YOU WON'T REGRET IT IN THE LEAST.

YOU KNOW, I CAN RECOGNIZE *SKILL* WHEN IT TRIES TO STAB ME.

IF YOU'RE INTERESTED IN DOING SOME SKULLDUGGERY WORK FOR THE CLASP, THERE COULD BE *A LOT* OF COIN IN IT FOR YOU.

THANK YOU FOR THE OFFER.

BUT I'M CURRENTLY EMPLOYED BY A GROUP WHO DESPERATELY NEED *SOMEONE* PROFICIENT IN STEALTH AND SUBTLETY.

VAAAAAAAAx!

WHERE ARE YOU, VAX?!

VAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAx!

I'M RIGHT HERE. YOU DON'T HAVE TO YELL.

AAAAAGGGHHH!

WHERE DID YOU--

LATER. NOW, WE NEED TO GET BACK TO THE PRISON.

I SUSPECT ESKIL'S SITUATION MAY CHANGE BEFORE THE DAY IS THROUGH.

ISN'T THAT THE REALMSEER?

AND THE MARGRAVE.

...SO *INCREDIBLY* SORRY FOR THE MISUNDERSTANDING.

YOU CAN, OF COURSE, UNDERSTAND OUR PRECAUTIONS.

OF COURSE.

GOOD DAY.

IT SEEMS THE CLASP WORKS EVEN FASTER THAN EXPECTED.

I SUPPOSE I HAVE YOU TO THANK FOR MY NEWFOUND FREEDOM?

MOSTLY THIS ONE.

ALTHOUGH HE STILL COULD HAVE ***TOLD*** US WHAT HE WAS PLANNING...

THEN YOU HAVE MY THANKS.

AND ALSO, I THINK, THESE...

ENCHANTED BOOTS. A LITTLE EXTRA ***ALACRITY*** FOR YOU. ESPECIALLY SUITABLE FOR SOMEONE OF YOUR SKILLS, I THINK.

NO ARGUMENTS HERE. THANK YOU.

DOES THIS MEAN YOU FOUND OUT WHO ACTUALLY ***WAS*** RESPONSIBLE FOR AWAKENING THE DRAGON?

SADLY, NO.

THE STONE WAS SENT HERE ***THROUGH*** THE CLASP, YES. BUT THEY MERELY SERVED AS THE COURIERS.

THE ACTUAL ***SOURCE*** OF THE STONE, HOWEVER, WAS SOMEONE HIGHLY PLACED IN EMON.

SHOULD WE, I DUNNO...

...GO FIND OUT WHO IT IS?

FOR ONCE, GROG IS ***ACTUALLY*** RIGHT. WE DON'T KNOW WHAT IT IS THEY'RE ***AFTER*** AS OF YET...

...BUT I DOUBT THAT SOMEONE WHO CREATED A DISRUPTION OF ***THIS*** SCALE WOULD GIVE UP SO EASILY.

ESPECIALLY IF THEY DON'T CARE ABOUT THE COLLATERAL DAMAGE.

PLUS, THERE MIGHT BE A REWARD IN EXPOSING SOMEONE PLOTTING AMONG THEIR RANKS.

WELL, I GUESS WE'RE ALL IN AGREEMENT.

ALSO, THEY ***FROZE ME.***

OH YES. ***DEFINITELY*** WANT TO KILL THEM FOR THAT.

IT SEEMS LIKE I'M ALWAYS SAYING GOODBYE TO YOU THESE DAYS.

DON'T WORRY, POP-POP. WE'LL BE BACK BEFORE *TOO* LONG.

I'LL TAKE CARE OF PIKEY! I PROMISE!

THAT'S--

OOF

--GOOD TO HEAR, MY BOY.

EMON, BABY! HERE WE COME!

EMON, THE BLADESHIMMER COAST.

OOH!

I MEAN, IT'S ***ALL RIGHT.***

IF YOU ***LIKE*** THAT SORT OF THING.

WE'RE GOING TO NEED SOME-PLACE TO STAY IN TOWN...

OOH, THIS LOOKS NICE!

I DON'T KNOW...

ACCEPTABLE.

HEY! DO YOU SERVE ALE?

UH.

YES?

YEAH, THIS PLACE WILL DO.

SO FAR, OUR ONLY REAL LEAD IS THAT THEY HIRED ***THE CLASP*** TO MAKE THEIR DELIVERY.

ALE ALE ALE ALE...

WHICH IS HARDLY AN ***UNCOMMON*** OCCURRENCE.

PARTICULARLY IN THE CASE OF NOBILITY WHO CAN ***AFFORD*** IT.

HE-LLO...

THEY'D HAVE TO BE SOMEONE WHO WAS WILLING TO WORK WITH ***CRIMINALS*** THOUGH, RIGHT?

I THINK THAT WAS COVERED BY SAYING "***NOBILITY.***"

MAYBE WE NEED TO START BY GETTING TO KNOW MORE PEOPLE IN THE CITY?

THAT COULD TAKE ***AGES...***

ALE!

SOOOO, DO WE HAVE TIME TO DO ACTUAL WORK WHILE WE'RE HERE?

Wanted

Reward. 100 Pieces of Gold A Tail

BECAUSE THE JOB BOARD HERE PAYS ***SO*** MUCH BETTER THAN IN WESTRUUN.

OH ***REALLY...***

MAKES SENSE. CITIES GENERALLY ***ARE*** MORE EXPENSIVE.

YOU'RE RIGHT ABOUT--

OH *NO*...

WHAT'S WRONG?

THAT IS WHAT'S WRONG.

OH *NO*...

"SO, WE **MAY** HAVE FAILED TO MENTION THAT OUR FATHER... OFTEN **WORKS** IN EMON."

AND WHAT EXACTLY *IS* HIS JOB IN EMON?

WHAT DOES HE *DO?*

WE'RE *NOT* TALKING TO HIM.

...HE'S A SYNGORNIAN DIPLOMAT.

I *DON'T* WANT TO TALK TO HIM.

I DON'T EVEN WANT TO *SEE* HIM.

YOU KNOW I HAVE ABSOLUTELY *NO* INTEREST IN SEEING HIM EITHER. BUT... THE OTHERS ARE *RIGHT* ABOUT THIS.

HE'S THE *ONLY* CONTACT WE HAVE WHO MIGHT KNOW WHO COULD HAVE PULLED OFF THAT SHIT IN WESTRUUN.

AND IT WOULDN'T HURT TO FLEECE SOME OF THAT GOLD OFF THE OLD PRICK.

AS DO I.

BUT MISERY LOVES COMPANY. SO LET'S DO THIS TOGETHER.

I HÄTE THIS.

IT'S PROBABLY BEST IF YOU WAIT OUTSIDE.

RAP

RAP

RAP

CREEEEE

YES?

WE'RE...WE'RE LOOKING FOR SYLDOR.

MAY I ASK WHAT IT'S REGARDING?

I'M VEX'AHLIA AND THIS IS VAX'ILDAN.
SYLDOR IS OUR FATHER.
ISH.
OH! PLEASE, COME IN!
AND THESE ARE OUR FRIENDS.
CHARMED.
HELLO.
VERY CHARMED.
HI.
WHO ARE YOU?
THIS IS YOUR SISTER AND BROTHER, VELORA.

WAIT...

...WHAT?

I SUPPOSE IT WOULD HELP IF I INTRODUCED MYSELF.

MY NAME IS DEVANA. YOUR FATHER AND I HAVE BEEN MARRIED FOR SOME TIME NOW.

SYLDOR IS JUST THIS WAY.

I DIDN'T KNOW THEY HAD A SISTER.

I DON'T THINK ***THEY*** DID, EITHER...

AHEM.

BUT I WANT TO *TALK* TO THEM!

PERHAPS LATER, MY DEAR.

HELLO, SYLDOR.

VAX'ILDAN. VEX'AHLIA...

....I WASN'T EXPECTING YOU.

STORY OF OUR *LIVES.*

OUR FRIENDS.

OUR *FAMILY.*

AWW, YOU TWO...

YOU'RE LOOKING... WELL.

AND THESE ARE...?

ACTUALLY, SIR, WE'VE QUITE RECENTLY ARRIVED IN TOWN.

WHILE SETTLING IN, WE JUST HAPPENED TO STUMBLE OVER YOUR JOB POSTING.

BY ALL APPEARANCES, YOUR NEEDS AND OUR SKILL SET HAPPEN TO BE A MATCH.

WE WERE HOPING YOU COULD TELL US MORE ABOUT THE JOB AT HAND.

AH, YES. TO BUSINESS, THEN.

NOW, I TAKE IT THAT YOU'RE FAMILIAR WITH MY WORK HERE IN EMON?

THAT'S ACTUALLY WH--

WHAT WE'VE HEARD, YES.

YOU KNOW, FROM YOUR KIDS.

MUCH OF WHAT I DO WOULDN'T BE POSSIBLE WITHOUT A DIRECT LINE TO THE COUNCIL OF TAL'DOREI.

IN MY CASE, THE MEMBER OF THE COUNCIL I WORK WITH IS NOT MERELY A BUSINESS ASSOCIATE.

"HE IS A **FRIEND.** SIR GREGORY FINCE.

"AND CURRENTLY, IT SEEMS THAT HE'S **MISSING.**"

HOW LONG HAS HE BEEN GONE?

I'M NOT ENTIRELY SURE.

IT'S BEEN MORE THAN A WEEK SINCE HE'S REPLIED TO ANY OF MY CORRESPONDENCE.

THAT IN AND OF ITSELF IS ***UNUSUAL.***

"I VISITED HIS HOME, BUT THERE WAS NO ANSWER.

"AND SOMETHING ABOUT THE **DARKNESS** OF THE PLACE... IT LEFT ME FEELING UNEASY."

IN SHORT, THERE IS SOMETHING ABOUT THE CIRCUMSTANCES THAT FEELS... *DANGEROUS.*

AND THAT'S HARDLY *MY* PERSONAL AREA OF EXPERIENCE.

THAT'S TOTALLY *OUR* AREA OF...

...STUFF WE DO.

YES.

WELL.

I WOULD NEED YOU TO VISIT HIS HOME. PERFORM A THOROUGH SEARCH.

SEE IF YOU CAN FIND ANY CLUES TO SIR FINCE'S WHEREABOUTS.

THE COUNCIL'S BUSINESS HAS BEEN AT A STANDSTILL SINCE A RECENT ATTEMPT ON THE SOVEREIGN'S LIFE FAILED.

I'M NOT SURE IF ANYONE ELSE IS EVEN AWARE THAT SIR FINCE IS MISSING.

DO YOU THINK THIS INVESTIGATION IS SOMETHING THAT YOU CAN MANAGE?

OF *COURSE* WE CAN MANAGE IT. THIS *IS* WHAT WE DO.

WE'RE *VERY* GOOD AT IT. WHICH IS WHY WE'RE *SO* EXPENSIVE.

WE'RE--?

VERY, VERY EXPENSIVE.

HE IS SOMEONE I HOLD IN HIGH REGARD, BOTH PROFESSIONALLY AND PERSONALLY.

WHATEVER THE COST TO FIND HIM WILL BE WORTH IT.

THEN IT LOOKS LIKE WE'RE ON THE JOB.

"I'M NOT SURE THIS JOB IS A GOOD IDEA."

I'M SORRY I PUSHED US TO MEET HIM. I'M NOT SURE THAT WAS THE ***BEST*** IDEA.

THE CLASP KEEPS CLIENT PROFILES SECRET, BUT MAYBE I SHOULD CONNECT WITH THE LOCAL CHAPTER AND TRY ANYWAY.

SO ARE YOU SAYING THAT WE ***DON'T*** ACTUALLY DO THE JOB FOR SYLDOR?

BECAUSE I'M ***SURE*** HE EXPECTS US TO DISAPPOINT HIM ***YET AGAIN.***

AND I, FOR ONE, ***REFUSE*** TO GIVE HIM THE SATISFACTION.

THAT'S ***NOT*** WHY WE CAME TO EMON.

MAYBE NOT. BUT ***THAT*** CHANGED AS SOON AS WE SET FOOT IN ***HIS*** HOUSE.

MAYBE...

...MAYBE IT'S A GOOD IDEA TO DO ***BOTH?***

WE'D HAVE A BETTER CHANCE OF FINDING WHO WE'RE LOOKING FOR. RIGHT?

KEYLETH IS RIGHT.

A TWO-PRONGED APPROACH MAKES IT TWICE AS LIKELY WE'LL LEARN WHAT WE NEED, FROM SYLDOR'S CONTACTS ***OR*** THE CLASP.

YOU CAN HEAD UP THE JOB FOR SYLDOR ***AND*** TAKE ALL THE CREDIT.

AND YOUR SHARE OF THE GOLD?

I SUPPOSE THAT WORKS.

I'LL GO WHEREVER THE ***PUNCHING*** IS.

TALKING IS PROBABLY THE BETTER APPROACH WITH THE CLASP.

AND ANYONE BEYOND ME GOING IN WILL PROBABLY RAISE THEIR SUSPICIONS.

AH, BUT YOU'RE IN THE ***BIG CITY*** NOW, VAX.

MAYBE THE SMALL-TOWN THIEVES WERE UP FRONT WITH YOU.

HOW DO YOU KNOW ***THESE*** CLASP GUYS WON'T JUST LIE TO YOUR FACE?

I THINK I HAVE A SOLUTION...

I COULD COME WITH YOU. I HAVE WAYS OF GETTING THE TRUTH OUT OF PEOPLE.

...WITH A LITTLE ***HELP,*** OF COURSE.

I REALLY DO BETTER ALONE WITH THIS SORT OF THING.

AND SOMETHING TELLS ME YOU'VE NEVER SNUCK INTO THE UNDERGROUND HIDE-OUT OF A CRIMINAL GUILD BEFORE.

THERE'S A FIRST TIME FOR EVERYTHING?

BUT WHAT IF-- AND HEAR ME OUT HERE--***PIKE WAS INVISIBLE!***

BECAUSE I CAN ***DO*** THAT.

I ***SUPPOSE*** THAT COULD WORK.

THAT'S ***PERFECT.*** THANK YOU, SCANLAN.

SHE CALLED ME *PERFECT.*

SHE REALLY *DIDN'T.*

I THINK THIS IS IT...

...CHARMING.

IF "HAUNTED" IS YOUR PREFERRED AESTHETIC, SURE.

DO YOU REALLY THINK IT'S HAUNTED?

I DOUBT GHOSTS CAN AFFORD THE RENT IN THE CLOUDTOP DISTRICT.

I DON'T TRUST GHOSTS. YOU CAN'T *PUNCH* THEM.

HELLO? IS ANYONE THERE?

NO ANSWER.

AS EXPECTED. SO, HOW DO WE GET IN?

I'M SURE I CAN PICK A LOCK. HOW HARD CAN IT BE?

I GUESS THIS IS REALLY MORE *VAX'S* THING...

WAIT, YOU TWO *DON'T* SHARE A BRAIN?

STEP BACK, PLEASE.

BANG

CREEEEEEEEEEE

YOU'RE WELCOME.

AFTER YOU.

KLANG KLANG KLANG KLANG

PICKLE.

I KNOW YOU HAVE FAR LESS EXPERIENCE WITH THIS THAN I DO.

BUT EVEN THOUGH THEY CAN'T ***SEE*** YOU, THEY CAN STILL ***HEAR*** YOU...

SORRY!

IT'S JUST KIND OF HARD TO BE SNEAKY IN ARMOR.

I KNOW. JUST...DO YOUR BEST.

KLANG KLANG KLANG KLANG

OH WOW.

THIS MIGHT TAKE A WHILE...

To be continued in *Vox Machina Origins* Series IV!

CRITICAL ROLE

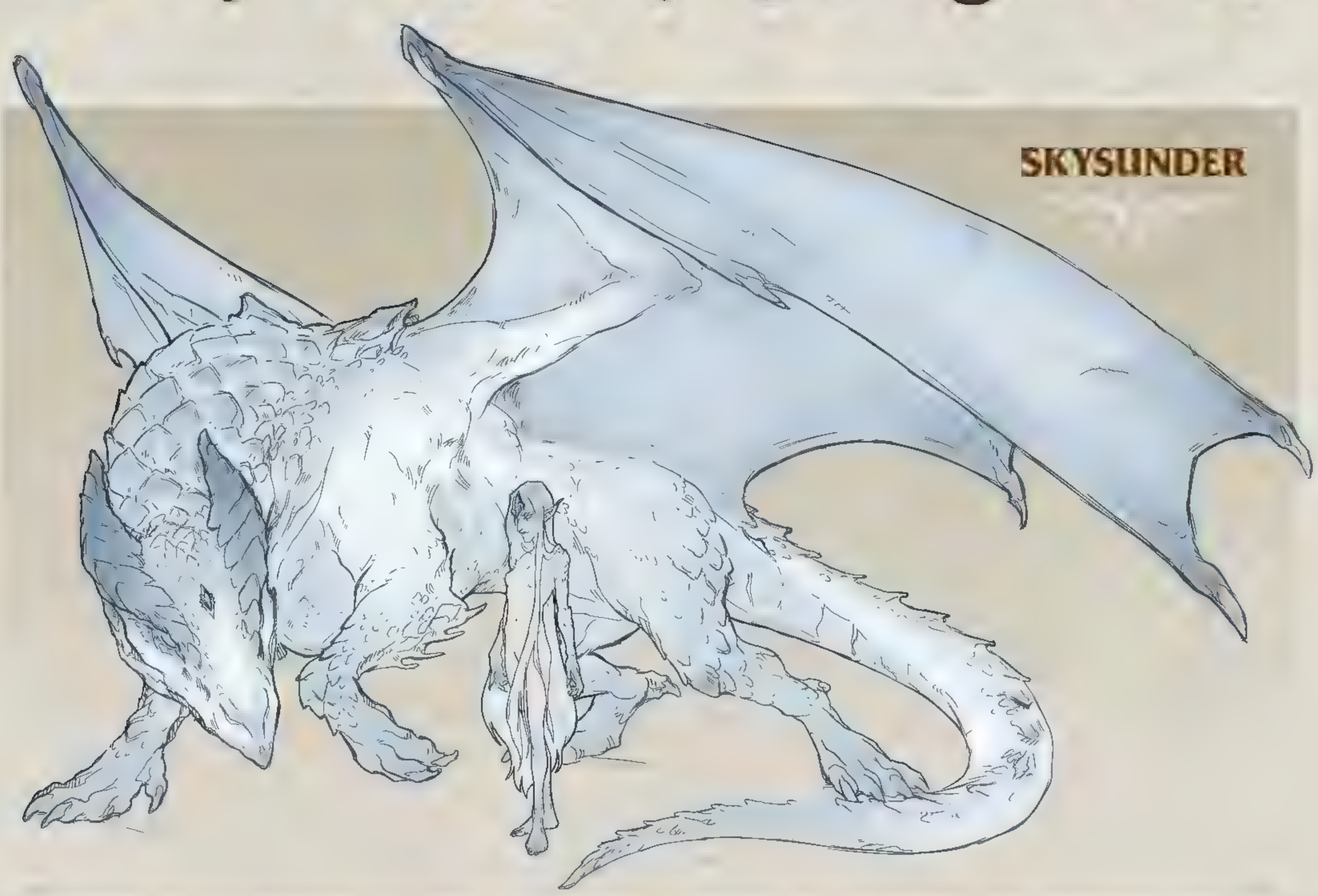
VOX MACHINA ORIGINS

SKETCHBOOK

Illustrations by Olivia Samson | Commentary by Rachel Roberts

VOX MACHINA

SKYSUNDER



As elegant as she is dangerous, Skysunder's bitingly cold and calculating persona is expertly exemplified by both her forms. Her icy blue color palette and towering dragon silhouette are the perfect juxtaposition for the rich, dark colors of Vox Machina's designs.

DEVANA VESSAR

VELORA VESSAR

SYLDOR VESSAR

ESKIL RYNDARIAN

JEKT

NOJA

Returning characters Eskil, Jekt, and Noja are joined by many new faces in this arc, including Vax and Vex's father Syldor, his wife Devana, and their (surprise!) half-sister Velora. This was the first official appearance for the latter two, so special care was taken with their designs.

LORAN
THE BEAR

MARGRAVE
ATRIX

NIMA
THEROS

KRADIN
GRIMTHORNE

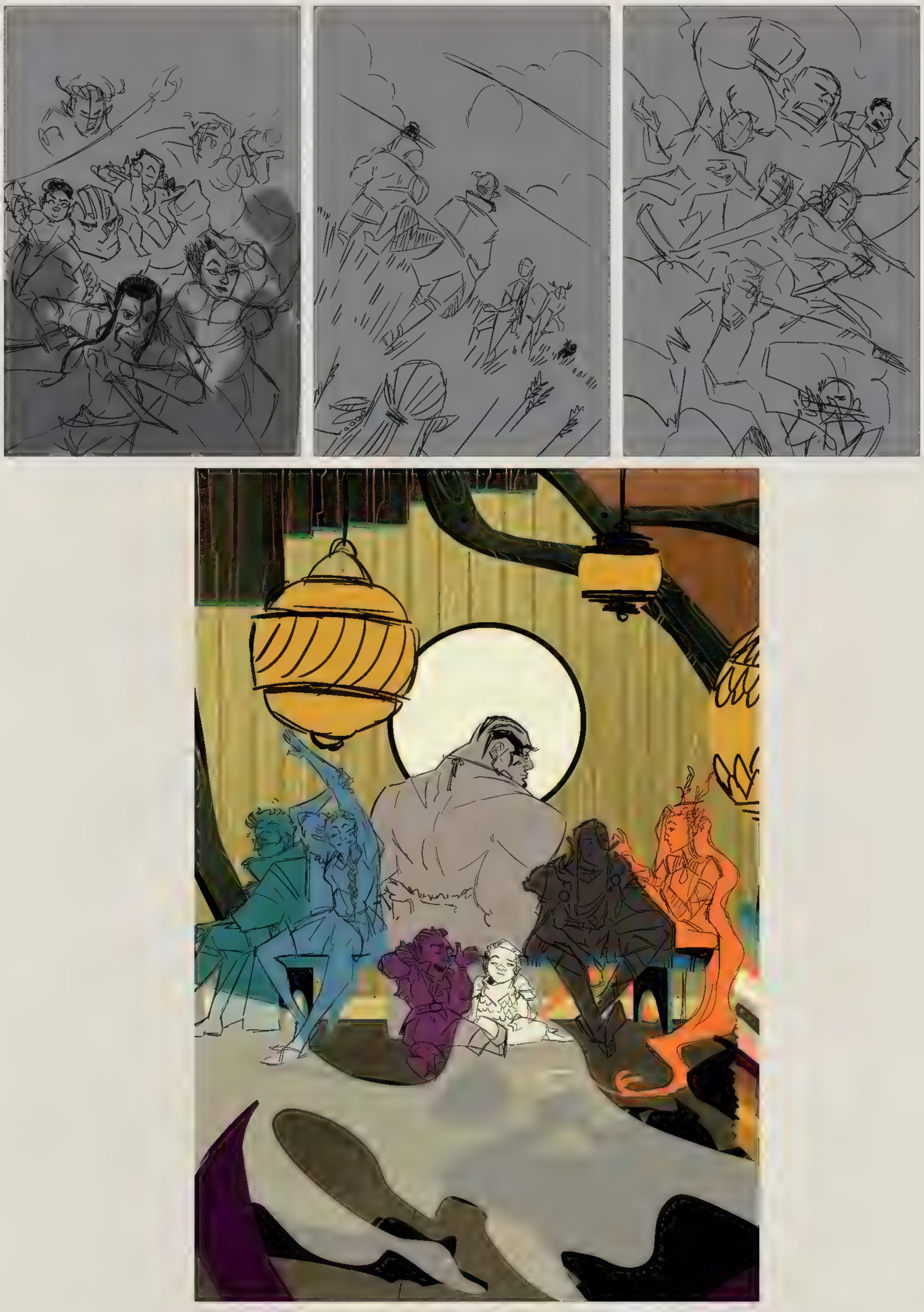
SPIRELING
FETCH

LORAN'S CREW

Also new this arc: Loran the Bear, his crew, Kradin and Nima from the Brawlers' League, Margrave Atrix, and creepy Clasp member Spireling Fetch. Despite their roles being short-lived to varying degrees, each design is easily recognizable. A boon for those wild fight scenes in particular!

Cover sketches (*top, middle*), pencils (*bottom right*), and final art (*opposite*) for issue #1. Where there's ale, there's Grog! And the rest of Vox Machina, of course. Minttu Hynninen's soft painting style and warm palette made for a perfectly cozy way to introduce our tipsy heroes' newest comics arc.

Illustration by Minttu Hynninen



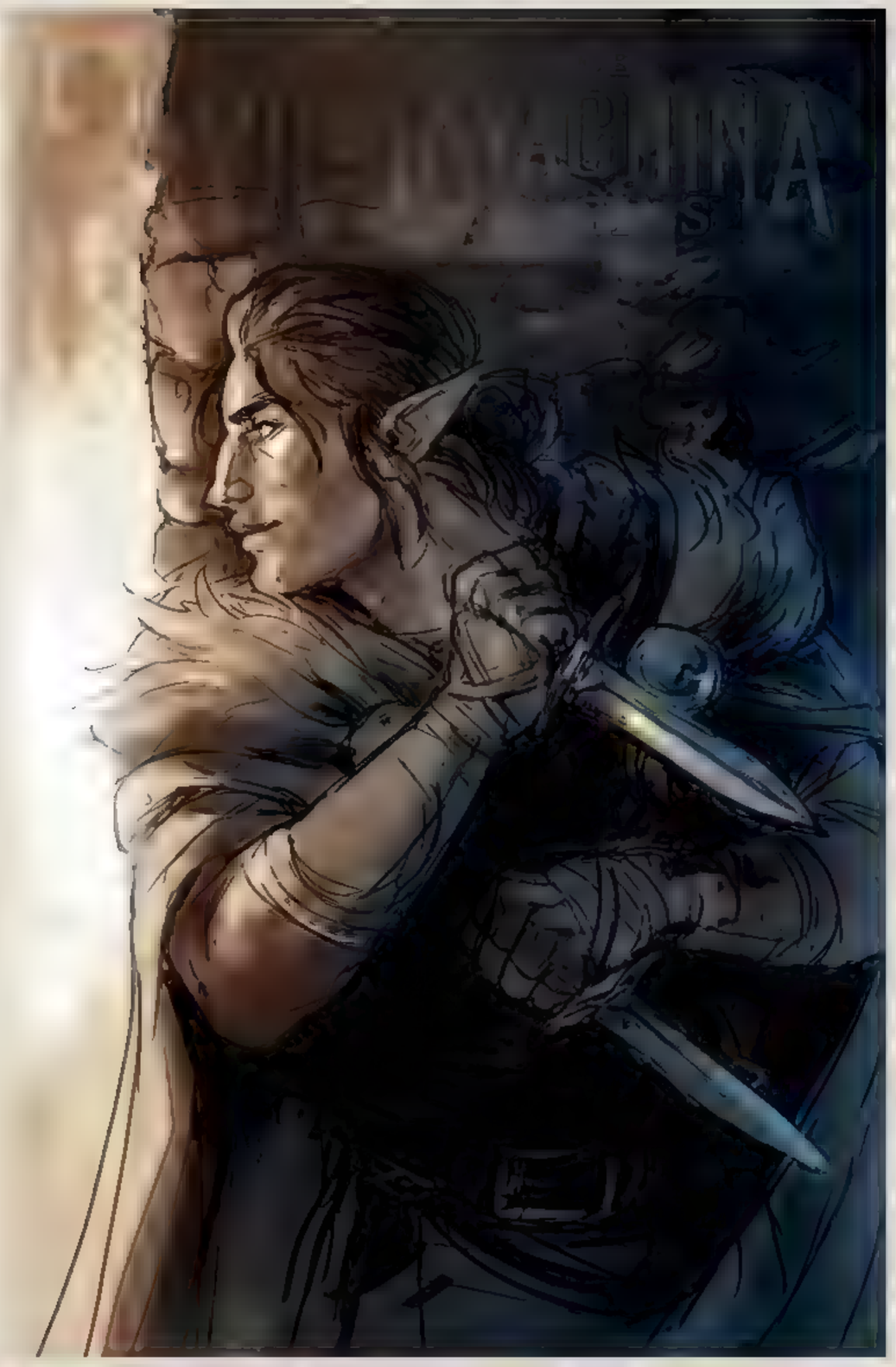
Cover sketches (*top*), colored sketch (*bottom*), and final art (*opposite*) for issue #2 by Jess Taylor. At first glance, this avant-garde piece looks like Vox Machina just enjoying some downtime. But if you look closely at the smoke, you can see the waylaid members of Goreshon's Fist…or what's left of them, anyway.

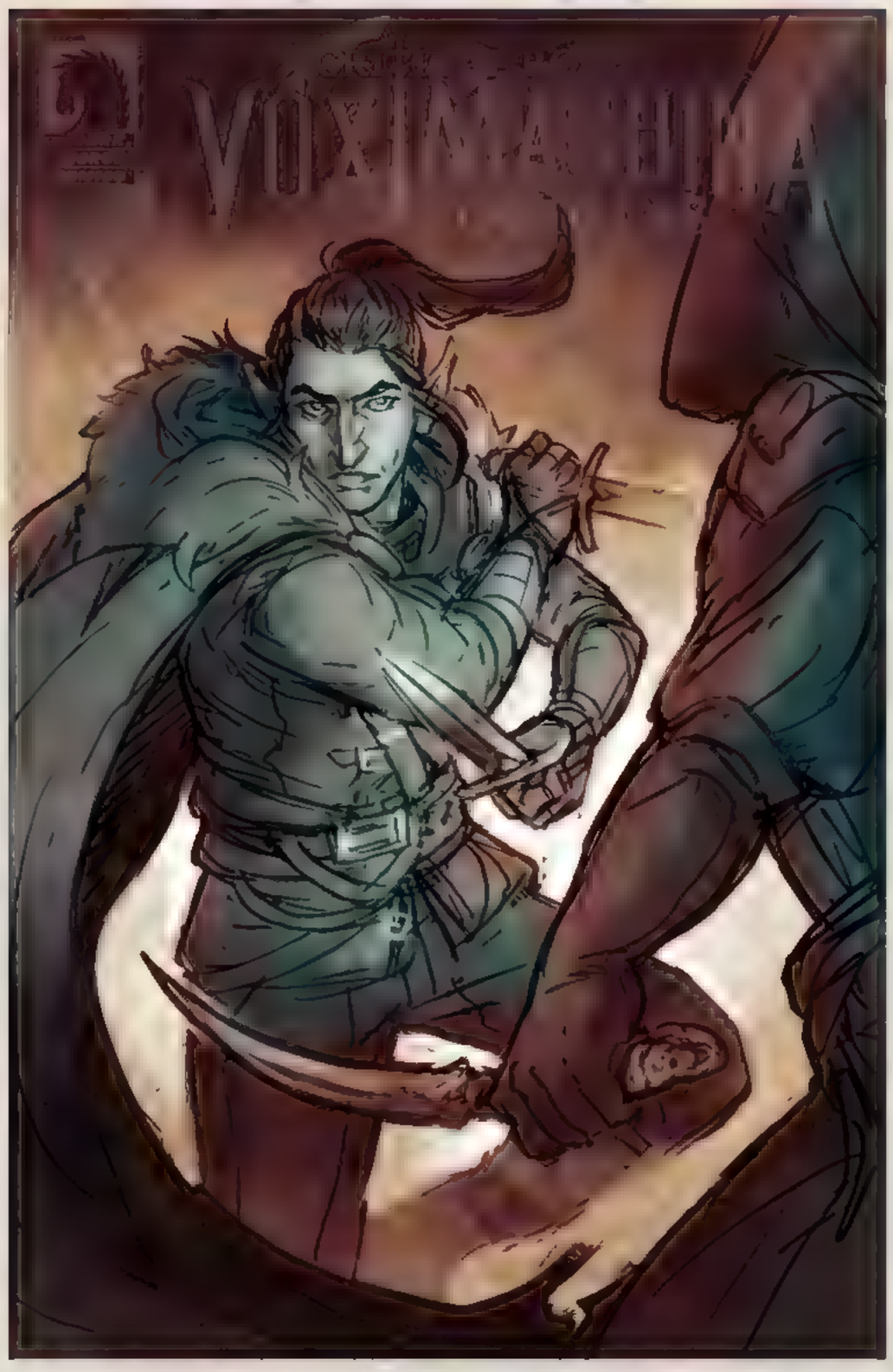
Cover sketches (*top*), inks (*bottom*), and final art (*opposite*) for issue #3 by Marina Romero Arias. Where issue #1's cover was warm and inviting, this cover is eerily cold, creating an almost tactile sense that Vox Machina is out of their…*ahem*, element.

Illustration By Mario Romero Art

Cover sketches (*top*), pencils (*bottom*), and final art (*opposite*) for issue #4 by Alexandria Monik. Despite being born from a similar idea to issue #3—with Skysunder's shadow looming overhead—this cover shows our heroes looking much more confident, assembled, and ready for battle within the blizzard.

Illustration By Alexandria Monik





Colored cover sketches (*above*) and final art (*opposite*) for issue #5 by Jonah Baumann. We couldn't forget about Vax! Since he was absent on the previous two covers, this was the perfect opportunity to give him the spotlight, and each of Jonah's sketches were as striking as Vax himself.

Illustration By Jonah Baumann

Cover sketch (*above*) and final art (*opposite*) for issue #6 by Tula Lotay. As with issues #1 and #3, this cover seemed to be a perfect, yet unintentional foil to issue #5. We loved featuring Kiki immediately after Vax…and brought to life in Tula's inimitable style, to boot!

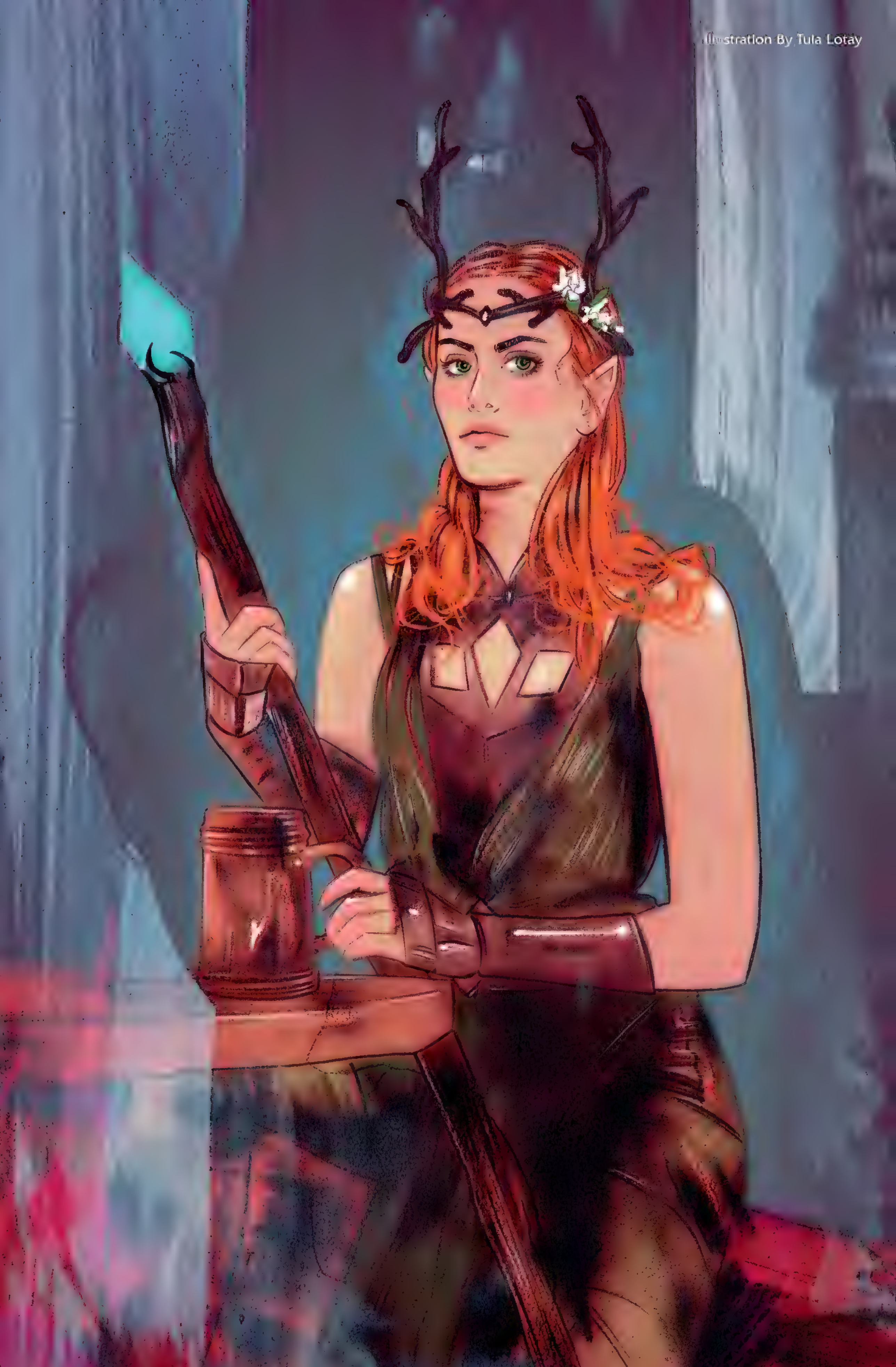


Illustration By Tula Lotay

CRITICAL ROLE
VOX MACHINA™
ORIGINS

The third series of the celebrated *Vox Machina Origins* comics, from Critical Role and Dark Horse!

Vox Machina enjoy a week in Westruun's lap of luxury leading up to the Winter's Crest Festival. But that costs coin, which has a bad habit of running out, so they join an underground fighting ring and bash their way to cash. Unfortunately, their ring-fighting turns out to be just a warm-up for a cold reality when a mysterious attack on Winter's Crest festivities leaves the whole town magically frozen—including one of their own. Vox Machina will have to save the day again, against a much bigger foe than they first realized!

Prepare for more misadventure with series three of *Critical Role: Vox Machina Origins*, from the *New York Times* bestselling team of Jody Houser (*Orphan Black*, *Stranger Things*), Olivia Samson, and Ariana Maher (*James Bond*, *Xena*) with J.P. Massa and Diana Sousa (*Crowded*)!

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CRITICAL ROLE

Media Tie-In

SON OF ULTRON

"THIS FAN... THIS MONSTER!"